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DECIDING WHO MAKES FOREIGN POLICY

By Zbigniew Brzezinski

If one thing should have been made clear by George P. Shultz's current stewardship as Secretary of State, it is that the besetting problem of who makes foreign policy is not the product of a conflict of personalities. The issue, as posed in recent years, is whether primacy in the area belongs in the State Department or in the National Security Council (N.S.C.). When Henry Kissinger headed the N.S.C. in the Nixon White House, it was alleged to be his ego and his taste for the Machiavellian that kept the Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, out of the center of things. When I occupied the same White House post under President Carter, it was said that my instinct for the jugular gave the N.S.C. an excessive share of foreign-policy initiatives, at the expense of Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance.

Yet in Mr. Shultz and the current N.S.C. chief, William P. Clark, we have two men who, to all appearances, enjoy a relationship untroubled by ego trips in either direction. Indeed, Mr.Clark is generally perceived as not deeply involved in the complex substance of key foreign issues. Nonetheless, in recent months, the press has noted that influence has been gravitating away from the experienced Mr. Shultz to the able but relatively inexpert Mr. Clark. Surely that speaks for itself, suggesting that the problem that has bedeviled a succession of Presidents is not one of individuals but of organization.

What is the proper arrangement for the shaping of United States foreign policy? The traditional answer — that the policy should be molded by the Secretary of State — seems to have been proving increasingly inadequate. It would appear that the old formula can no longer cope either with the challenges we face abroad or with the distribution of power in Washington among key agencies involved in promoting national security — of which foreign policy is a part.

This institutional difficulty has, in fact, been perennial in the modern age. For many years, the main struggle over foreign policy was between the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense. It was only later that public attention shifted to the conflicts between the Secretary of State and the national security adviser.

Of course, the personal element does enter into it, as it does into every human endeavor. A reading of the various relevant memoirs of recent years leaves little doubt that personal conflict did affect the relationship between Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Rogers, although one cannot discern very profound policy differences between them. There was also evidence of conflict, occasionally intense, between Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. and the former national security adviser Richard V. Allen; again, policy disagreements do not seem to have played a significant role. During the Carter years, the situation was somewhat different. I have denied many times that there was any personal conflict between me and Mr. Vance. But there were occasions when we had rather dissimilar views on policy issues.

These differences, personal or substantive, tend to spill over and produce wider interagency conflicts. And recent years have seen a full measure not only of the traditional conflict between the State and Defense Departments but of the newer conflict between State and the N.S.C. for pre-eminence in the making of foreign policy.

Control over turf is a very important bureaucratic asset. Institutions tend to fight over areas of responsibility as much as over policy. And policy differences or personality conflicts between principals tend to intensify and accentuate institutional conflicts over turf. Currently, there is a new phenomenon in the area of foreign policy. I call it "parcelization," a term used in rural economics to describe the dividing up of land holdings into smaller parcels — and, progressively, into still smaller ones.

Today, the making of foreign policy involves a pronounced degree of parcelization. Take the Middle East.

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There was a period when the State Department had preeminence in this region, but lately the initiative seems to have passed to the White House. A new Presidential negotiator for the Middle East, Robert C. McFarlane, has been plucked out of the N.S.C. to assume more direct personal responsibility for this area of nonactivity.

On Central America, policy is apparently under White House control, exercised primarily by the national security adviser, Mr. Clark, though he does not have any extensive experience in Central American problems. The State Department appears increasingly to be playing a secondary role, while the Defense Department and the C.I.A. actively promote their own special ventures.

On Far Eastern questions, and particularly in the relationship with China, the action seems to be primarily dominated by the Defense and Commerce Departments, with the State Department playing a secondary role.

On Europe, the State Department appears able to maintain its traditional predominance in the more conventional areas of United States-European relations, such as diplomacy and defense policy. At the same time, however, the shaping of our relations with Europe is being increasingly shared with the Commerce Department and the President's special trade representative.

On arms control, there appears to be a three-way split. The State Department seems to be playing a major role in shaping our proposals and defining our negotiating strategy on secondary levels, for the Secretary of State does not seem to be too interested or well versed in the intricacies of this problem. Lately, even this secondary responsibility has come to be shared increasingly with the Defense Department. On a higher conceptual level, the job of framing some long-term consensus on our arms-control and strategic policies has been given to a special bipartisan commission of experts drawn from public life.

In the making of national security policy, we have, in effect, a chaotic nonsystem. And that nonsystem, I think, reflects some of the persistent institutional problems that have eluded solution in recent years. Where, then, does the solution lie?

To start with, it is important to remember that the position I had the privilege of holding in the White House carries two titles. The formal one is Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. The informal title, not to be found in any Governmental document or legislative act, and yet widely used by the press and by Presidents themselves, is that of national security adviser. And these two titles encapsulate the two roles that these close associates of the President have tended to perform.

As Assistant for National Security Affairs, the incumbent is meant to be an objective and detached processor of key issues. He is supposed to define these issues and present them for Presidential decisions, integrating for the President the views of the State and Defense Departments and the C.I.A. He is also called upon to prepare the basis for an objective analysis of the problems involved if there is dispute between the affected agencies.

But the second and unofficial title — national security adviser — implies something more. It means that the occupant of this post is indeed an adviser to the President, and thus a subjective participant in this allegedly objective process. He is supposed to make choices and influence the President's decisions.

There is bound to be some conflict between these roles, and some occasional confusion. And there are bound to be situations in which the national security adviser steps on other people's toes. You will recall that at different times in recent years, national security advisers have acted as spokesmen for the President — even, occasionally, as secret negotiators.

It should be borne in mind, however, that when they did so, whether it was Mr. Kissinger or myself, it was with a Presidential mandate, at the President's specific request. This is explicitly stated in Mr. Nixon's and Mr. Carter's memoirs. Yet the the performance of these tasks by the national security adviser inevitably generated public dispute and was, by and large, perceived in Washington as an illegitimate usurpation of the rightful prerogatives of the Secretary of State.

This view of the national security advisers' activities was personally damaging not only to the advisers but, sometimes, to the Presidents they served. Mr. Nixon resolved the dilemma by appointing Mr. Kissinger as Secretary of State. Mr. Carter's similar dilemma was resolved by the American electorate. Yet the issue remains.

There are three basic reasons why certain tasks dealing with foreign policy in its national security context can best be carried out by the national security adviser. First, there is the increasing intermeshing of diplomacy, intelligence and defense. You cannot reduce national security policy only to defense policy, or only to diplomacy. Secretaries of State all too often confuse diplomacy with foreign policy, forgetting that diplomacy is only a tool of foreign policy, and that there are other tools, including the application of force.

Thus, integration is needed, but this cannot be achieved from a departmental vantage point. No self-respecting Secretary of Defense will willingly agree to have his contribution, along with those of other agencies, integrated for Presidential decision by another departmental secretary — notably, the Secretary of State. And no self-respecting Secretary of State will accept integration by a Defense Secretary. It has to be done by someone close to the President, and perceived as such by all the principals.

Second, decision making in the nuclear age is almost inevitably concentrated in the White House. So many of the issues have an ultimate bearing on national survival, so many crises require prompt and immediate response, that a Presidential perspective on these matters has to be maintained and asserted. It cannot be done from the vantage point of a department.

Third, foreign policy and domestic politics have become increasingly intertwined. The time when foreign policy could be viewed as an esoteric exercise by a few of the initiated is past. Today, the public at large, the mass media, the Congress, all insist on participating in the process, and that makes coordination at the highest level all the more important.

In searching for a remedy to the problem in all its aspects, we must recognize that the elimination of conflict is an idle dream. Conflict is bound to exist whenever a number of individuals are engaged in a decision-making process, whenever a number of institutions project different institutional perspectives. So some conflict is unavoidable and is bound to be with us, enlivening and, one hopes, enlightening our lives. But some tempering of conflict is possible. And, in that respect, it would be useful to look at our national experience in two other areas of decision making.

The first is national defense. In fighting World War II, we managed without formal, institutional integration of decision making. The war was conducted by the War Department and the Navy Department on the basis of some informal institutional arrangements —

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notably committees established by the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. George C. Marshall, with President Roosevelt's approval.

But the war taught us that this situation could not endure; the response was the coordination of civil and military decision making under the National Security Act of 1947. That act created a body, the National Security Council, with statutory membership limited to the President's immediate associates. In practice, attendance was somewhat wider, and initially included the Secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force, as well as the three service chiefs of staff, along with the Secretary of State and the holder of the newly created post of Secretary of Defense — all under the chairmanship of the President.

Additional reforms over the next few years centralized the system further. The service secretaries and the service chiefs were removed from the N.S.C. That left the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, another new post, as the only authoritative voices in the N.S.C. on defense matters. The service secretaries were removed from the Cabinet as well, leaving the Secretary of Defense as the sole authoritative voice on defense matters at that level. A unified approach was adopted in defense budgeting.

These moves toward more centralized control evoked enormous opposition. Yet who today would suggest that the position of the Secretary of Defense be abolished, and that we go back to a situation in which defense policy was shaped by three secretaries, each representing a different service, each fighting for his own budget, each shaping that budget and its strategic priorities within his own department?

There has been a similar evolution in the area of economic and fiscal policy. Until 1921, all departments and agencies of the United States Government made special, separate requests for funds to Congress. They did so directly, with copies to the President. It was only in 1921 that the Bureau of the Budget was made an agency, within the Treasury Department, responsible to the President, and the various departments were forbidden to ask Congress directly for money.

In 1939, on the eve of World War II, the Bureau of the Budget was transferred from the Treasury Department to the Executive Office of the President. In 1970, the Bureau of the Budget became the Office of Management and Budget in order to support the President in the exercise of managerial control over all Government departments. And in 1974, the appointment of a Director of the Office of Management and Budget was made subject to confirmation by the Senate.

Would anyone claim today that the existence of such a director inhibits the effective shaping of our national economic policy? Would anyone argue that the Secretaries of Commerce or of the Treasury cannot perform their functions because of the existence of such an arrangement?

I believe we must face up to the need for similar reforms for better coordination and integration of our national security policy. The first step, in my judgment, ought to be to upgrade the office of Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs by redesignating it as the office of the Director of National Security Affairs, comparable to the post of Director of the Office of Management and Budget. This would give it the status and authority it requires for the coordination of national security recommendations as they emanate from the State and Defense Departments and from the C.I.A.

Second, the appointment of the Director of National Security Affairs should be made subject to Senate confirmation. Only such a process would create a formal position fully legitimized in its functions. In such a setting, it would be clear that the Secretary of Defense is responsible for defense, that the head of the C.I.A. is responsible for intelligence, that the Secretary of State is responsible for diplomacy, while integrating the work of these three agencies into comprehensive national security policy is the responsibility of the Director of National Security Affairs.

Indeed, the clarification of the role of the Secretary of State as specifically responsible for diplomacy could, in time, open the way to yet another highly desirable step — the appointment of the first Secretary of State from the ranks of the professional Foreign Service. For then the Secretary of State would be clearly seen as professionally responsible for the task of managing our diplomacy, but would not be mistakenly perceived — as he has been in recent years — as a would-be architect of overall foreign policy, with its large security dimension.

Last but not least, I believe that such an arrangement would permit a more reasonable and effective relationship between our national security policy and our legislative branches. Under existing arrangements, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs is inhibited from appearing before Congress, since his testimony is viewed as an intrusion on the rightful prerogatives of the Secretaries of State and Defense. Once his appointment is subject to Senate confirmation, his appearance before legislative bodies would be normal and customary. He would be in a position to articulate our national policy on the President's behalf.

In effect, in the area of national security, we would be adopting an arrangement analogous to the arrangements developed earlier for national defense and the national economy. It would not resolve conflict altogether; it would not prevent divisions; but it would create a structured and orderly system in the central area of policy making — that of national survival. ■

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